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SMOKY ROSES

LYMAN BRYSON



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SMOKY ROSES

BY
LYMAN BRYSON



G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press
1916

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LYMAN BRYSON

[Handwritten signature]

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no!

To

MY FATHER AND MOTHER

For permission to reprint some of the following poems thanks are due to the publishers of *The Forum*, *The Independent*, *The Poetry Journal*, *The Anthology of Magazine Verse*, 1914, *The Colonnade*, *The Survey*, *The Boston Transcript*, *The Midland*, *The New Republic*, and *Poetry*.

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Smoky Roses



SMOKY ROSES

THE "mogul" rides the east wind,
Cleaving the dust and heat,
Speeding from dawn to twilight
With thunder and lightning feet.

The smoky roses wither
Breathing the dust and sand
Where the old man guards a crossing
With a red flag in his hand.

He coaxes from the waste heaps
A meagre garden space,
And brushes the tearing cinders
From the rose's tender face.

His smoky roses wither
Under the cinder and ash,
And the red rose dims to greyness
In the joy of her first red flash.

The long days are contentless,
The yards are a small, tight world;
He watches trains for Frisco
That over the plains are hurled.

CONDEMNED

FROM dawning the joy of your spirit
Was touched with the dread
Of the wan hidden hand stretching near it,
The hand of the dead—
From those who have struggled before you
And sinned for their bread.

Behind the high piles of fine raiment
In the luxury mart,
You dream of your own limbs' adornment,
And guiltily smart
With the first growth of infamy's planting
Taking root in your heart.

When your sweet body, spent and pain-broken,
Is weary past rest,
And the words of your soul, yet unspoken,
Shall die unexpressed,
And the heart that God gave you for loving
Is iron in your breast,

Then they that have kissed you shall curse you,
And invoke from their lair
Their own sheltered women, who loathe you,
Who see snakes in your hair,
Who shall drive you to hide with Medusas
And imprison you there.

Your brothers, who boast of their city,
For you have no name.
Too busy with progress for pity,
Too careful for blame,
They weave your red shroud out of silence:
Their cost—and their shame.

THE GARMENT

'Tis I who ask forgiveness, I, who bought
The garment when I did not know
That its maker hungered as he wrought
And patterned it with sweat marks in a row
And fought
The little mists of red, that come and go.

Little mists of red in blistered eyes,
That never close for rest or sleep,
Save when despair with heavy menace lies
And palsies of exhaustion onward creep,
And dies
The haggard will that this last watch would keep.

No bitter word of mine, no burning deed
Had ever helped him face this woe.
I had been all oblivious of his need,
I had not seen his weary hands move slow,
And bleed
With needle stabs as they sagged to and fro.

And still I wore as decent Sunday best
My brother's handiwork of pain;
While his wan soul a stranger was to rest,
And his heart's blood a futile sop for gain.
Confessed—
My late repentance shall not be in vain.

WHISPERS

SOFT black against the sky, whose evening green
Is sharp and pale with autumn chill, the towers
Go swinging up with many yellow eyes.
One star shows at the skyline, facet-keen,
And in the close of their enslavèd hours
The crowds creep on the pavements, insect-wise.

Out over moving workers, whispers go
Like the insistent, quiet, secret, tone
Of thought to thought, across wide silence heard.
Why is there never one, of those who know,
To catch the heavy meaning of that moan
And feel the godhead in his spirit stirred?

Have we not asked you the secret,
You, who are high and serene?
Venturing toward your far wisdom,
Falling in chasms between?

Have we not sent up our prayers,
Inarticulate—begging for speech?
What have you done to bring beauty,
Or love of it, nearer our reach?

Out of the whirl we are clamorous,
What have we heard that was sweet?
What fire is brought to our spirit?
What torch is set for our feet?

Guideless and hopeless we follow—
Why should you wince from our fall?
You have not beckoned above us;
Can it be—Heaven is small?

These faces move like bubbles on a tide,
Breaking upon eager trolley cars,
And vanishing like bubbles on a beach.
But may there not in these film bubbles ride
Strange ancient greatness in dim avatars,
Struggling in such whispers for its speech?

OLD MAN LAKS

THEY tell me Old Man Laks is dead!
Old man Laks—burned in his bed;
Dropped a lighted cigarette;
Now his neighbours can't forget
How, after midnight beer discussion,
They had drunk and rolled and chattered,
How their stupid doze was shattered
By his screaming oaths in Russian.
I'd been in his unkempt store,
Went to try his cigarette.
When I slammed the loose-hung door
I heard an old voice thinly fret,
"Well, what would you?"—from the dark.
He told me where his wares were kept
But to serve me did not deign,
So I explored his musty ark.
When no buyers came he slept
Or lay silent, with his pain.
Through the curtained door was seen
His red table and his lamp.
It smelled of fish and kerosene
And the outer room was damp,
But when buyers were so few
There was scarce enough to eat;
He could not buy comfort, too.

And he seldom left his cot,
And was never on the street,
Lay there silent and forgot
With a rug across his feet.
But I never saw him read
Though he seemed to know by heart
All the heavy Hebrew tomes
That were heaped in those two rooms;
And he knew each subtle part
Of his strict and ancient creed.
He had cigarettes for sale—
Were they smuggled?—That's a pale,
Weak transgression, if you please.
Every stranger can't be taught
That to break a law in Kiev
May be virtue, but deceive
On this side the swarming seas
And it's deadly sin—if caught.
So his life was sordid, yet
He deserved a nobler death
Than to choke in flaming breath
From a burning cigarette.
Once I looked at his white hair
Out upon his dingy bed,
And I saw the shadow there
Of some blessing on his head.
There was something, some denial,
Some great thought he locked within,
Or some undiscovered passion,
Ghost of some long-conquered sin,

That had given him his trial
In no overt, common fashion
But in secret. Or some power
Lay forever unaroused
And the breast where it was housed
Never throbbed in one great hour.
That was all. But it was there
In that face and outflung hair.
But he lived and burned. God mocks
Greatness, in such men as Laks.
My soul with searching has grown lean
But this moment has been mine
To see the smudge of fire divine
In life so pitifully mean.

GRATITUDE

MIST has hung for chilling hours;
Mud is cold upon the street;
And the daylight slinks away
In defeat.

By the dripping, bricky walls
An old woman weakly drags,
With no comfort but her scant
Clammy rags.

Greeted by a bleary light
Through a green door, left ajar,
In she totters, half afraid,
To the bar.

When they fill her flask for pence,
Back she goes to her damp hole,
Where the gin will sink and burn
To her soul.

But when one is very old,
And rag blankets get so thin,
There is heartfelt thanks for drink—
Hot as gin!

THE STREET CLEANER

THERE you go with your broad shovel
Heaping them in gutter-sheaves,
Though a heart that ached for beauty
Thanked his God for scattered leaves.

Let them follow whispering journeys,
Droop and rest in tan decay,
Swirl and rustle on the pavement,
Hide the road of asphalt grey.

Let them huddle through the winter,
Patient under snow and rain,
Till their chemistry of wood-mould
Turns the road to earth again.

Then some poet of the grass stems,
Strong and brave through winter night,
May wake and thrust a green blade upward
Through the pavement into light.

MY TOWN

My town is freckled green and gold
In the pleasant summer-shine,
When the day is jewel-bright
Over elm and ivy vine

But the streets are grey and cold,
When the snow blows, swift and fine—
How the shanties, gaunt and old,
Cower along the river line!

SUMMER IN THE TENEMENTS

They have cried war on sunlight. Their fair
fields

Are builded over with dark alley sheds.

Once fertile earth now nothing living yields,

And sweats beneath the tenement's hot weight.

Grey ash-heaps have usurped the violet beds.

These people hold the sun from earth. Their fate

For this unkindness is that every breath

Is a weariness and burning taste of death.

For these were green fields once. These trodden
stones,

These cluttered hives are over ancient graves

Of apple trees and roses. Dully drones

Life now among these smothered little rooms.

They have cried war on sunlight; nothing saves

Them from his searing wrath. His hot gaze
dooms

Their children to the torture of this heat.

They balked the sunlight and they know defeat.

The sunlight loved the fields but cannot love

These sullen walls and streets. He blazes down

In deathful protest. From a sweep above

He strikes some men to death and some go mad,

14 Summer in the Tenements

Suffering for the sin of their grim town,
Which robs the sun of sweet fields he once had.
But men who built these sheds to insult the eye
Of the sun, are not the men who pay—and die.

THE FLOOD

THE cold black water lapping at her face,
That I remember. There were others too,
Many others, but most died in fear,
And muddy waters choked them in their prayers,
Curseful, unholy prayers for their mean lives.
Some died in fury, some in pain, none prayed
As she did, for another, as she felt
The cold black water lapping at her face.
My friends were out of danger. At the foot
Of the little hill we stood on water swirled
Full of foul broken things. We searched and
searched

To find some floating help to send to those
Who cried across to us. We swam for two
And pulled them, sodden, up to where we
breathed.

We could have done no more, but if my eyes
Had wandered sooner over that black tide
And seen her white face as she held on high
Her baby, I'd have jumped, chance or no
chance.

When I first got the shock of grief that was
Her distant face, I saw her clinging close
To a swaying wall and holding by one hand,

As the water, breast-high, rocked her on her
perch,
To a little raft, some drawer or table top,
Enough to float her baby. As her lips
Moved in the very anguish of her prayer
The water reached her throat. She set the
raft,
Frail tipping bit of wreckage, on its way.
Without a farewell kiss, or touch, she gave
Her baby to the flood and as she watched
The raft careened, as if afraid to bear
Its dear freight over such a deadly road.
The cold black water lapping at her face—
It was no more than half a moment's time
She clung there, swaying, but I saw the hope
That filled the moment, saw how unafraid
She tasted death, and how she thought her
prayers
For the baby's life were answered.

Then she sank,
Not as the others died, not in despair,
Nor fear, nor fury, but with sweet content
Austere and holy on her face. The flood,
Black hideous moving death, rose up and
crushed
The baby's raft before the moving light,
Where her white happy face had been, was gone.

THE PROPHET

JEREMIAH, will you come?

Will you gather up the multitudes and wake
them with a drum?

Will you dare anoint the chosen ones from all
the cattle-kind?

And threaten with the fire of God the foolish
and the blind?

Jeremiah, Jeremiah, we have waited for you
long

To see the flaming fury of your hate against the
wrong,

For we dally in the Temple and we flee the eye of
Truth,

And we waste along the Wilderness the glory of
our youth.

Jeremiah, Jeremiah, here the lying prophets
speak,

Here they flatter in their feebleness the gilded
and the sleek;

But languid pipings die in shame when trumpet
cries are heard.

Are you coming? Are you coming? O Prophet
of the Word?

INVOCATION

GIVE me no guerdon until I have won it
In love and labour and pain.
Grant me no peace till my spirit has sung itself
Out into freedom again.

In days that are full of this slothful distemper,
Nights that are weary of rest,
Months sliding by in this vacant monotony,
I am forgetting my quest.

The candle is guttered before my fond altar;
I should have leaped to the flame
And burned up my life as a torch to the angel,
Whose face turns away from this shame.

Give me no comfort in bitter repentance
For days that are empty of dream;
Give me no comfort until my dim vision
Has wakened again to the gleam.

FOR ME THE TEARS

IF God will not decree that you and I
Shall go, thus hand in hand, unto the end,
If there must come a time when one alone
Must, shuddering, walk to the darkest brink,
May that be peace for you—for me the tears.

If it be so, and one of us must turn
Back into common daylight from the grave,
Go on with living when there is no life,
Forlorn of joy in spring, and sun, and night,
Because of springs remembered and nights gone,
Uplifting weary eyes with decent calm
And hearing neighbours say how well 'tis borne,
That is the bitter portion—death is peace.

If you who go ahead shall find a place
All filled with calmness, passionless, and sweet,
And making it more human with yourself,
Wait there the glad day of my second death,
All purged of my unworthiness by grief,
I'll come to you in that eternal place.
I pray that I may drink the deeper cup;
Death may be peace for you—for me the tears.

SOME EVENING

SOME April evening, when the sky
With a blue and silver fringe
Lies upon the earth so nigh
That far hills take on its tinge,
Under elm trees, black and tall,
You will stand in this same place
And a few cool drops may fall
Soft, upon your upturned face.

If you call them only rain,
Thinking I am gone past tears,
Then their falling shall be vain,
And I'll be gone with my dead years.
For they shall be tokens sent,
By a ghostly, fond device,
From one who finds his heaven spent
And weeps alone in Paradise.

IN THE HOUSE OF PAIN

FOR grave I choose a green and sunny slope
Where apple trees, full fruited, bloom the hill.
Then may the strength that holds in my still
heart

Grow healthily into the sturdy trees,
And may the apples be as sweet and kind
As is my grateful farewell to my life.
If ever friendly plough shall turn my mould
Into the open sunlight, may the wind
Scatter the dust across the window-sill
Of some contented cottage, where a child
May trace the foolish pattern of a man
In my forgotten, ancient dust—and smile.

DEDICATION

BECAUSE I remember that day in March,
We stood alone in our secret place,
The winds that wrestled in elm and larch
Were helping the sun's keen ray efface
The lingering snow, the last spent trace
Of winter's beauty; because your face
With hair blown back and eyes sprung free
Illumined the world and compassed me
With the glory that none but you could see;
Because I have found for my soul's emprise,
Holding on vision in dawn and night,
No other sanction than faith which lies
Like an unfed flame in your face, the light
On my face lifted up to your height,
Making me worthier in your sight;
Though my heart learn iron—as the world is
shod—

I know that my one faith cannot nod.
I give to you what I have from God.

PHANTOMS

LOST

THE mist came up and choked the street;
I could not flee through there,
For an iron lamp post grinned at me
And waved its yellow glare.
A woman sobbed and almost saw
When I hurried through her hair.

I could not go the way I came—
That door was bolted fast;
And those who threw me out from home
Set heel against the past,
Not knowing I had heard them count
My breathing till the last.

How could a phantom face the dawn?
My grey limbs shrank in fright.
I could not find the way, there was
So little left of night.
Terror strangled me, I smelled
The coming of the light.

There was no time! There was no time!
Why was I born so late?

I looked in through a door and saw
A banquet set in state;
A man with thick and greasy smile
Worshipped at each plate.

I drew the breeze in through my heart
And laughed—no flesh was there!
My hands were clasped before my face
But each of them held air.
Terror stopped my eerie laugh—
I was not anywhere.

I knew no way, I knew no way,
Let loose too near the morn,
There was no time to find the way;
I wound about forlorn,
Wondering at my weariness,
For I was yet new-born.

I saw the light cut through the mist,
The dawn, blood-thirsty, broke.
Too late—I'd lost the way for those
Whose souls are made of smoke,
And I was mist and in my throat
The misty air did choke.

I saw my own thin hands dissolve
And turned me to the wall;
The sneering sun seared out my face,
There was nought left to fall.
Only this wailing memory
Floats—and remembers all.

TRIUMPH

At my first touch his head fell back,
I saw his eyeballs shine.
I froze the warm blood at his heart,
The marrow in his spine,
And put him in the fear of death,
To tell him he was mine.

I came upon him in the night
And knew him for my own.
I saw the everlasting soul,
That through his body shone;
And knew that when all else was mist
He'd cling to me alone.

Mine for æons yet unborn.
The love he knows on earth
Shall seem a joyless, puny, thing
When I, with solemn mirth,
Welcome him among the stars,
When his dead self has birth.

Then he will feel no bitter trace
Of wife-things left behind,
Nor see the shadow of a face,
When we ride on the wind.
And he will give me fleshless love,
But I will not be kind.

THE BUILDERS

Close to the earth he is building his towers,
Towers of vapours that shift and surge,
Vapours of damp, poor ghosts of showers,
Materials meet for the intricate powers
Of one who is master, not mere demiurge.

Out of the trimmings that fall from his planing,
Trimmings of vapour that fall in the street,
I have been fashioning eagerly, feigning
That my vapours weren't what the Builder,
 disdaining,
Had dropped from his work and spurned out
 with his feet.

I have been fashioning halos for lanterns,
And veils for the gas-lamps. I almost believe
There are hearts in the flickering women my
 hand turns
Out of the mist; but the step of a man turns
Them chilly with fear—they congeal on his
 sleeve.

But the Builder—*he* sees me at work with the
 vapours
And gathers the rubbish before I have done.
He stirs up the morning and snuffs the star
 tapers,
Awaking the world to go on with its capers,
And fills up my streets with the wind and the
 sun.

FINGER TIPS

OUT on the rim of the mist of my soul

Linger thy finger tips;

And I, in the shadows that whirl and roll,

Am trying to reach to the rim of my soul

And bless them with my lips.

Words cannot go to them, but the unspoken,

Echoless, vague, and murmurously sweet,

Wait in a silence forever unbroken,

Wait, and wistfully long to be spoken,

Thy name to repeat.

Friend out there on that misty sea,

Lost where my vision dips,

Seal one touch to the heart of me;

Reach, ah, reach, through the misty sea,

Just with thy finger tips.

THE STIRRING

SEE yonder little, fleecy, summer's cloud
That lazily blows in the passing breeze
Across horizons of a hundred hills
In aimless travel on the vapour seas,
The sport of every breath of wind that blows,
As if it could but sail and cared not where;
Think you that in some mystic way it knows
That it must wander in the lower air?
Think you that ever, nebulous and faint,
In that dim shadow soul of skyey things,
It does not long with longing half conceived,
To mount into the height with billowy wings,
Into the blue—blue—azure deep as life—
Far, far immensities of open sky?
Would it not soar in that ethereal
That never-ending space, and never die,
If but the strength of an unknown desire
Could work in deeds as does the grosser fire;
Think you it may thus, impotent, aspire?

When life throbs slow, and slower still, and faint,
And like a watchful sentinel Death waits
To strike the spirit groping in the dark,
Think you the captive Essence never hates
The struggle to remain ill-housed and bound,

When far above, and deep below, and vast,
A Chaos, limitless and ever new,
Stretches ahead when once the door is passed?
Think you that e'er the warm full life returns,
Bringing back the mortal cloak that clings,
And life's too fair illusions place regain
And lull the dormant call of final things,
Think you that in the moment's glimpse beyond,
The soul unfettered does not stir from sleep
And wake to longing for the far, far, flight
When loosed from earthy bonds across the deep,
From sphere to sphere it wings a tireless way?
Does it not long to go before it may,
And dread the sordid dawning of a day?

MOONWRAITH

MOONWRAITH lies along the floor;
Swooning shadows in the street
Tremble as they pass the door,
For the white print of her feet,
On the steps and ancient floor,
Left Perfume sweet.

And the very air she breathes,
Through the quiet of the room,
In its silent moving wreathes
Odorous sweetness in the gloom,
As in springtime when she breathes
Orchard bloom.

Moonwraith lies so still and pale
That I hold my lips in pain,
Lest the silver vision fail,
And my eyes with sorrow vain
Gaze on stones where, lily-pale,
She hath lain.

THE GUEST

NIGHT came, and wind
And after that the rain,
Falling like the memory
Of long-worn pain.

Open was the door,
And open wide my heart,
Eager for the guest from whom
I shall not part.

All the sound I heard
In all the dripping pain,
Was never eager footsteps
But sad, cool rain.

VENGEANCE

I SENT my enemy to Hell
And, for the evil he had done
To me and everyone
Who came within his cruel clutch,
They made him suffer overmuch.

Then, after he had burned a while,
I went to visit Hell again,
To smile at him in pain.
He made me see his face all singed.
I'll not forget—now he's revenged.

THE CHILD IN SUMMER

I WONDER why the wind runs on the hedge
In just the way I'd have it run,
And why it moves among the friendly trees
As if it had no one but me to please.

Everything I see the breezes do
Seems always just the way I want it done.

Whenever all the flowers droop and die
And I make blossoms of my own,
I'll make them just like these a-growing now;
I love them so, I will remember how.
And if there's no one else to call them sweet
They'll still keep growing sweet for me alone.

SONG OF THE ROAD

How shall I know what lies beyond
Where the long road turns to blue
Save that I travel that way myself
And follow the long road through?

For I was born on the broad highway,
And the moving wind is kin.
What is a house but a prison wall
To keep my heart shut in?

And I have a house at the end of the road,
Where my secret way doth lie,
And there I shall go when I quit my song
And cover my face to die.

But how shall I know why over there
The long road meets the sky
Save that I travel that way myself
And ask the last hill why?

A NAMELESS BIRD

I HAVE no name to call one loveliest bird,
Which at my sunlit morning window sings
His first fresh carolling, though I have heard
Each song with grateful rapture as it brings
Day and dew and breezes to my eyes,
And bids me go forth to accept the earth
When Summer offers it for my surprise.
He celebrates our wonder in sweet mirth
While we look out together on the green.
For this I call him Brother, and I praise
Him, nameless, for the exquisite and keen
Bright beauty of his greeting to my days.
If he had any name he'd be but one
Of many like him, and not mine alone.

WET JUNE DAYS

WHAT strange god's weeping makes our June
so sad?

Whose tears must overflow so fast,
Like misty traces of all Aprils past,
Long since forgotten? Once we had
A radiant brother Sun, who made us glad
With cheerly given greeting. Hills
Which now the grey-green vapour hides and
chills
Danced in the flaming sunbeams, mad
With beauty, as of old danced the Mænad.

But now the skies are all dissolved in rain.
The river has grown hostile; black,
It hurries like a serpent, and its track
Will mark its banks with serpent stain.
One lonesome bird, wet-feathered, tries with pain
Just to remember how he thrilled
His friends, the leaves, before spring-song was
killed,
Drowned all in fog. He tries in vain,
And young trees shake with agues in the lane.

SONG

MAIDEN, thou and this bright day
Would make me wish that I
Might here my wayward hours spend
And rest me, till I die,
For here I've found my journey's end,
Where beauty sweet doth lie.

Oh, give me not an idle smile
That vanishes with day,
And kiss me not, or I shall weep
When kisses pass away,
But bless me with one kindling glance
And at thy feet I'll stay.

TO A CERTAIN FAIR LADY

YOUR heart is like a poplar tree,
Full of sunlit greenery,
A thin lace pattern on the sky
That trembles when the winds go by.

And every zephyr, every day,
That comes adventuring its way,
Feels it as tremulously waken
As if it never had been shaken.

GOLDEN ROD

“HAS the wide green plain been fruitful?”

Ask the gods of wind and rain.

“Has the bounty of maize been all fulfilled?”

“Is labour repaid for them that tilled?”

“We bear witness!” answers the grain.

“The bursting sod has yielded,

“And wherever the green stalks nod,

“With dim new glory of dusty gold,

“The plain is fringed with a glow—Behold!

“The blessing of Golden Rod!”

MOTHER OF A SON

O WOMEN who mourn in the cities above me,
On the farms, in the towns, by the lakes,
Wherever the folly of man sows wind
And the heart breaks,
This is my son!
This is my sacrifice unto your sorrows!
His sinews are born of the nights of my weeping,
They are strong for unnumbered and mist-
laden morrows.
Entrust all your secret tears into his keeping
As his mother has done.
My love shall be soul of his love and shall heal
you,
In your pain, or in shame, or in pride,
For in him the heart of my heart lived on
When my youth died.
O women who mourn in the dawn glow or twi-
light,
By the hearth, at the well, in the field,
Whenever the stir of your grief moans, pray
That my faith yield—
Blessing the rack of God's tear-stricken plan—
From manchild—a man!

MORNING

THE bright-vestured morning comes singing,
singing

Into the world of sleep.

Its song of sweet silence is bringing

A spirit of joyousness into the hills,

A fresh wakened sparkle into the rills,

An open sky for the things that fly,

And day for the things that creep.

The song of the morning is ringing, ringing

In the bells of a thousand flowers.

The dew that is mistily clinging

Is shaken and shines in the new gold sun,

While into the day, hours lustily run,

And over the down the waking town

Sits smiling among her towers.

BALLAD

THEY stirred me from my bed at morn;
The sword they brought was red.
They hissed of where my father lay,
Stricken dead.

I fought the damp mist in my soul;
My heart was small and cold.
Though blood was reeking on the blade,
Revenge was old.

I fingered with shut eyes the nicks
Where foes had left their mark,
Like features on a dead man's face,
Touched in the dark.

I found the lonely, lonely room
And touched the silent thing;
I had not known how much like gall
Cold lips can sting.

Then forth into the stranger world,
Bold in a sudden breath,
I went to find my foe and make
Another death.

There is no hatred in my breast
And wan sick is my eye;
But cold steel must be warmed again—
A man must die.

WINTER

THE wide white hill is cold and far,
 Why must I go?
Daylight pales to the ice-point star;
When thin lone winds that whistle weird
Come after, I shall be afeard
 Of the snow.

You never will find me on that white hill
 Though you search till day,
And the sun come over when I am still;
Though my heart take courage and start to beat,
Winter will turn your friendly feet
 Away.

You never have told me why I must go,
 And you do not see
Where the path is lost in the waste of snow;
You know not the winds that haunt my fear,
Nor the friend that searches that wide, white bier
 For me.

MRS. COBURN IN THE "ELEKTRA"

O FRAGILE woman, shaken with the heart
That was a stricken Titan, how camest thou
Within the glory of the antique art
That faded to its twilight, long ere now?
There lies a Greek serenity on thy brow
Though all the meaning of thy mouth is woe,
A woe begun before thy murderous vow,
E'en when thy rude gods struck thee, blow on
 blow

Around thee, slowly, Argive shadows go
But for thy bruised soul no comfort hold.
Now he who hears thy living voice can know
The deathless tears that pity wept, of old;
And in the strength of thy pale passion sees
The ancient fire that burned Euripides.

RULERS

So have you walked in sorrow,
So have you walked apart,
For the first word of creation
Stirs in your brooding heart.

The power-stained hands of rulers
By sword, or voice, or votes,
Tear at the law's confusion
With prayers that burn their throats.

But the ancient faith of the spirit
In your soul was planted deep;
The thrill and thrall of the lasting flesh
Were given your hands to keep.

Men-children talked of ruling
And fought for the futile rod,
While you lay beyond their knowing
Discussing my birth with God.

So shall you walk in sorrow,
So may you walk apart,
For the whisper of creation
Stirs in your brooding heart.

HYMN TO BAAL (1914)

OH, Baal, God of battles, God of blood,
Have we not sacrificed unto Thy name?
Have we not given tithe of all things good
And worshipped Thee in everlasting shame?

Have not high greed and lust been honoured
arts?

Do we not make for hate unhindered room?
Have we not given little children's hearts,
Worn out in torture at the clucking loom?

Have we not driven woman souls, distraught,
Hating them for beauty and for pain,
To death? See what our righteousness has
wrought—

Such bloody immolation at Thy fane.

Give ear, oh Baal, unto Thy worshippers,
They who have prated other Gods than Thee,
Still labouring beneath Thy potent curse,
Their deeds have helped Thy various Hells to be.

Withhold Thy hand, must we give all—all—all
Our youth unto Thy holy murder rites?
Must they be bayoneted as they crawl
To rot in alien trenches for the kites?

We bow at Thy command. Too long our days
Were given to the seed of this despair
For us to shudder, loathing Thy dark ways.
We bow—but lift our purpled hands in prayer.

Grant us that in the greatest of Thy feasts,
When half the earth is shambles, the black doors
Of Thy fell heaven shall open for Thy priests,
Thy czars and bloody-fingered emperors.

Take to Thyself, oh Baal, in Thy red hour,
Thy chosen children, high-put priests of war,
With escort of our young sons, slain in flower—
And keep them in Thy bosom evermore.

Take to Thyself Thy kings. The peoples yet
Will worship in Thy temples. Now they reel
For they have seen Thy face. Let them forget
This cataclysmic fury of their zeal.

Thy kings can do no more to honour Thee,
For now as men stalk over desolate lands
Their dark, blood-shot imaginations see
Christ, with a levelled carbine in his hands.

CATALPAS

CATALPA blooms, that are always dying,
Falling leprous on the lawn,
Were you stirred at my secret crying
When I walked before the dawn?

Catalpa blooms, that live for an hour,
Was my sigh but a windy breath,
Blowing down one more cold flower,
Wan and white and fain of death?

How could you know—your life is but giving
One faint scent as a day goes by—
That some buds flame with the glory of living
And blaze their hearts to the open sky?

Catalpa blooms, that no graves are kept for,
Lying leprous on the lawn,
How could you know what flowers I wept for
When I shuddered at the dawn?

THE POPPY

ASTARTE'S face in the blood-red moon astare.
No breath—all silence in the heated gloom.
Shuddering in a swoon the passionate air
Holds in the garden as a narrow room;
And down the path, the bending poppy-bloom
Burns through the velvet dusk a crimson flare.

The poppy has no words, but potent fire,
Bold in the darkness, rises in her heart,
Makes throbbing anguish of her soul, entire;
Sears the thin petals of her face apart.
Her slight stem, shrinking from the unseen dart,
Betrays the ardour of her vain desire.

An alien wind is questing on the path;
The swinging, swaying poppy petals hold
A languor that no other love-flower hath.
The stranger wind knows how the tale is told,
Scatters the poppy suddenly, with cold—
Astarte bleeds the moon in futile wrath.

A PORTRAIT

HE's one of those on whom the Muses smile,
But never shall make mad. His discontent
Awaits him at the corners of the day.
We never hear him whimper, but he scolds
At sterner friends, or for a broken gleam
Of beauty, half-achieved, mourns fretfully.
So faintly touched with grace that fineness bears
The calumny of weakness, but too fond.
He thinks the Muses' smile will give him fame.

THE LOVE-WROUGHT WORD

THEY say that where the Titan condor swings
Above the bleakest Andes' misty blue,
Gazing down the valleys of Peru,
Alone, returning from far wanderings,
Sometimes a humming bird, mere moth which
brings

A breath of flowers and a taste of dew,
Comes fluttering up the ice on webbed wings.
So into pale austerity of mind,
Where logic conquers as a taloned bird,
A poet's gossamer device may find
A perilled way when, with ambition stirred,
It mounts to mirror in the ice behind
The flashing beauty of a love-wrought word.

EVERY PILGRIM

WITH eyes that strain for morrows
And for searching sin and woe,
With a mouth that sweetness borrows
From the smile that greets a blow,
With hands too light for toiling,
And feet too swift for soiling,
With no dread of despoiling,
 With no staff shall he go.

Into the heat and sweating
And clinging grime of day,
Into the heat, forgetting
The clean morn as he may;
With uncertain brows that tighten
When the first load will not lighten,
And a gaze that cannot brighten
 On a goal too far away.

Though the fresh dew on his shoulders
Will soon vanish in the sun,
He must smell the dust that moulders
On the graves, ere he is done.
The West hoots his desires,
And the East must mend her Fires,
And the North and South are liars;
 Nowhither may he run.

But it is not useless going
That the gods would fain forget,
Nor the false seed of his sowing,
Nor the tears his eyes shall wet;
For they must know in their musing
That he loves, and fears not losing,
That he dreads no death in choosing,
And laughs at sure regret.

There is no need for weeping
Because life will grow stale,
There is no need for keeping
Young lips from growing pale;
But sadder than all sadness,
And wearier than madness,
Seems youth who laughs with gladness
Though knowing he must fail.

THE EXILE

A LONG low shaking wind ran through the grass,
And overhead the all-but-silent leaves
Touched one another gently as afraid
Of the unwonted silence in the wood.
Then slow across the edge of open land,
Forspent with wanderings and still alone,
Lifting his bright feet through the meadow
 blooms
And scenting with tired joy the evening air,
There came the god Apollo, shut from Heaven,
And cast upon a wonder-hating world.
Very sad and strange as was his sigh,
His voice a promise seemed of all delight.
The ancient tree he leaned on conscious grew
Of his divinity but trembled not,
Just bending on the radiance of his head
Its listening branches as he paused and spoke:

“I have not loved these shaded hills in vain
Nor ever have returned to this dim wood
Without remembrance and a kindlier welcome;
This green earth woos me freshly to my rest;
So were the earth and hills in ancient summers.
But an unwelcome change is in my brothers,
These weary sons of women who, in toil,

Forget their kinship. My own song has come
Like a sweet whisper and their clanging ears
Have never heeded it. So loud they shout
Their need of corn and wine, and clamour long
Within the markets, music knows them not.
Pan's pipes are fallen unto bastard satyrs,
And careless Bacchus sleeps, his dull-eyed crew
Drinks and drinks and drinks, but still is dumb.
A god may weary in such weary days
And I am weary with their misery.
They have not loved Olympus; all the gods
That once ranged over Heaven from that hill
Are wandering forlorn and not a shrine
But pilfered ruins on Athenian hills
Is open to them, and no worshippers
Wait there to keep a sacrificial flame.
How can they know that nectar does not bide
Within the cup they never dare to lift?
Though dryad trees go screaming through the
mills
Their spirit, breathless, broods in every wall
That men have raised against the muse of
song.
Still Triton's hair entangles in the whirl
Of their great ships that lash a heavy way
Over seas, still Neptune's own dominion.
Exiled in immortality we wait
Until the face of man be lifted up
And from his lips, pain-scarred of laboured days,
Breaks forth again the glory of his song."

The god ceased speaking as his chariot sun
In slow diminished radiance on the sky
Proclaimed his greatness to the dark-hushed
world.

But from the city whose irreverent towers
Were glimmering with futile glow-worm stars
Came surging heavy smoke, a thick oblivion,
That dulled and then obscured the sun's farewell.
It stalked into the wood where Apollo rested
And as the little leaves shrank and upcurled,
And tainted was the sweet breath of the wood
He fled to find a holier resting place.

ANDREA'S MORNING

("Andrea del Sarto" by Robert Browning.)

LAST night, perhaps, I may have been more
kind.

Musing in the evening's sober quiet,
A peaceful melancholy cradled me
And soothed self-questioning. Now, my love,
The brackish dregs of old desires, astir,
Taste bitter, when the morning brings a pale
And virgin day, which I must soil and mar.
Sit here; let the fresh day-beams illumine you.
They may light new beauty in your eyes,
Your tired indifferent eyes, I call my stars.
No, I am not pettish, 'tis my mood.
My eyes are tired, too, my body's eyes,
And so my soul's eyes smart with too much
seeing.

Last night, I gazed upon a twilight piece,
"Silvered," I think I called it, well content.
This morning all seems like a tinsel screen
Whose charms are sick and tawdry, seen by day.
Last night I mused; this morning a harsh truth
Bids me to see. Ah, love, look not so wan—
You should not waste your beauty on those
friends.

Sometimes, Lucrezia, they ask too much
 And yet you will content them. Guard yourself.
 You are my model, now, as well as wife.
 Do you remember that I wondered why
 A beauty such as yours could not have soul?
 I thought your sweet perfection lacked a mind.
 I blamed you, since in such half-thinking, blame
 And praise are shades of the same melancholy—
 It mattered not. But now my thinking's clear.
 The lack is in myself; the fault is mine.
 Not art—my service in her name is great
 In being only what they call it, "faultless,"
 Though it were soulless still, which it is not
 To those who see. The soul is in a hand
 That draws aright, whatever it may draw,
 And I have drawn aright. Too well I know
 There is soul in the struggle not the deed.
 My fight has been to live, not to paint.
 Painting was too easy, but the soul
 Has had a sorry battle in my life.
 Aye, they will sneer at what I call my fight,
 They—for whom we do not care—will think
 Losing was so simple; and winning, hard.
 But the thing I've lost is not my art.
 You, my love, I've lost. That is my sin.
 You do not care. Even now your head,
 Turned aside with a forgotten smile,
 Proves we do not love. Proves I have failed.
 Those who can do the godlike deed, who feel
 In their own hands the power to execute,

Know, as I know, that what they do is naught:
Know that when their work falls, finished, done,
To them it is indifferent. Within,
Within their own breasts is the loss and gain.
The execution of our hands is naught
When 'tis complete. In it there is meaning
Only when it stops, midway to truth.
So I have lost, not what I might have done
Which were too much—but what I might have
been.

There must be some unknowing lack in me
Else you would love me. Though I choose to
hold

You dearer than all else, I cannot gain
More favour than is given any cousin.
Forgive me if my words are plain. But there,
You were not listening to them. Better so.
The glory you must fail to understand,
Royal favour, praise, and ease for work,
All these are worthless to me, for I know
How my hands could gain them if my heart
Thus could be satisfied. But no, the dream
That sometimes I have dared to look upon,
Knowing how wistful far it was from truth,
Has had no king, nor king's gold—only you.
If but once, Lucrezia, you could come
Unbidden to my arms, if your soft voice
Could call me, losing softness in desire,
If passion could but once flame in your eyes
And circle us with fire, and burn me through,

Then in that searing baptism of love
 I might be once divine and reach my height.
 Yes, many men have this, who have no art.
 I fail, because a being formed as I,
 Tuned to a higher key, gifted with clearer sight,
 Should feel it more—and feel it not at all.
 Such little gifts as deeds are paltry cheap
 To God, who gave us souls, souls to feel.
 And such as I who might have felt His breath
 Once in my life, ecstatic in my being,
 Would fill His purpose if I knew His touch,
 And like a harp, when struck, gave true response.
 I would not thus have failed if my desire
 For your love could but once be all fulfilled.
 Here, you see, the lack and fault is mine,
 For somewhere in your heart must be a chord
 I might have touched and won you. Failing
 here,
 I paint the perfect pictures men will buy.
 Last night the quietude of twilight peace
 Made all seem just, and I was sad—content.
 But now my fancies shrivel in the sun;
 The guilt is mine and mine the punishment;
 But punishment is not my “soulless” art.
 If you would give yourself, all, all, but once,
 That were enough, and end of earth's desire—
 The painting I could do in Paradise.

MIST

It was a vaporous midnight, and the dark
Unfriendly street forbade my journey home,
Put out grey questioning fingers, wet and cold,
That touched my face and scattered in my breath
Like filmy outposts of retreating gloom.
Beleaguered lights, with feeble yellow shine
Were brave, then craven, cheering as I came,
But shrinking from me, faithless, as I passed.

Then out of that white darkness came a shape,
Not stranger to me, yet not one I knew,
And seemed to lag before me as if loth
To turn and greet me openwise, but held
Unwillingly from flight. There was a sway
Of woman garments and small drops like dew
Shone on them, silverly. I saw no face;
My pace had eagerness, but not a step
Was gained in my pursuit, for still beyond
My reach and ken she moved. A yellow lamp
Glowed dimly on her though the darkness took
Her shadow gluttonously. She was—was not—
Was not—and was—until I tired of chase
And called aloud. My words came back to me
In little echoes and the night was still;
It was more chillily silent for my noise.

She turned then, pausing, searching me with eyes
I felt the gaze of but could not discern
Except as living shadows in damp gloom.
I feared to lose her utterly in the dark.
"Who are you, oh, who are you?" So my lips
Spoke out my question ere I knew.

"I am

"One whom you seek, and have sought, many
years,"

She answered, but I could not see her face.
Her voice was sweet and like a fountain fallen
From such a height that there is scarcely sound
But only vapours, rainbow-struck, to fall.
It came, heart-reaching, but no memory
Awoke to tell me who had such a voice.
I was still groping. "Did I know you once?"
Boldly I spoke. "And did I lose the grace
Of your forgotten presence which now comes
Disquieting?"

"You have not known me yet; -

"Although you seek me. I am but the shade
Of long desires, your own; a prophecy;
A portent, and fulfilment. I have come
To tell you that the end of fevered prayers
Will soon be granted you, for even now
Your soul is on the brink of your delight.
One hour is given. For one hour the depth
And height of all your destined joy shall be
Before you. In that hour be bravely glad,
For after it come other hours."

The night
Which had been chill and cloud-enveloped,
glowed
Now with a sudden splendour, for was born
A fire in my own eyes, dispelling dark.
So bright my eager vision was that moist
Uncertain flickering was trustworthy light
To judge a messenger of heaven by.
My soul believed.

“Bring me that hour,” I cried.
“Bring me that single hour of all. Hold back
“No moment from fulfillment. Let all joy
“That I am heir to drown me in a flood.”
She swayed and swept a hand out toward me.

“Wait;
“Remember that your all comes in that hour,
“All you shall ever know of love, of peace,
“Belief in heaven’s kindness, recompense
“For all that is thereafter, or before.”
And there was some far warning, but my soul
Surged upward in a clamour of desire
To know my all, to gather in one hour
My fruit of laughter. Never could my soul
Be braver than it was that moment, brave
To spend my greatest hour. But the unknown

Who waited, silent, shrinking, turned away
And sadness faintly touched me.

“I am she—
“Unhappy—who shall bring you in that hour

"The taste of love, the one breath you may know
Of passion without shadow, taint, or pain."

The vapours moving as she spoke brought chill
Rebuke to my fierce eagerness. There grew
A slow distrust of the moment and of her.

"I have not chosen fate for you," she said,

"But tears of mine are futile as your own."

"Give what is mine," I begged. "I have not
feared.

"Give me my own; be it bitter, I can drink

"The bitterness with a smile; or if that hour

"Shall come when all of joy—"

"Not all," she broke

My speech. "Not all of joy, but all that you

"May ever know." Again the dark drew down.

I saw her bending toward the yellow lamp

As if to keep within the light, as if

The night dragged at her garments; and I strode,

Though fear was on me, with an arm outheld

To clutch at her and keep her. "When will
come

"This hour? How shall I know it?" But my
hand

Struck hard the wet iron post beneath the
lamp.

"When comes this hour?" My cry was an-
guished. Slow

She drew aside from me. "When comes this
hour?"

The heavy fog grew heavier and the lamp,

As if affrighted by the chill advance,
Gave up its guttered life. An answer came
From somewhere to my echoed "When the
hour?"

"Now! Now!" her voice sobbed, and she fled
away,
And there were cold wet kisses on my mouth.

THE PATRIARCH

A COTTAGE in the dulness of mean streets,
By pavements flint and dusty, is a home
Of patriarchal dignity, and peace
Has rested on its dingy eaves. A Jew
Whose spirit still by far Siloam dwells
With stalwart sons keeps here his ancient faith;
And deep content abode with faith, but now
Grim sorrow is the steward of his house.
It was a shingled tabernacle set
With houses faced the same in outward look
But lacking in this hidden holiness.
Not in the eastern city's fetid slum
But in a street, a street where wagons passed
And hucksters cried and some few children ran;
But still it was a desert and no soul
Of fellowship was there, no kindly shade,
No welcome neighbour friendships and no love.

Into the patriarchal house, a boy
Came out of deepest Russia, ignorant.
In his own race he knew no straight-eyed pride,
And things he knew of Western life and ways
Were half imaginary; still unlearned
He boasted knowledge. Feverish for trade,
Thin money sounds made all his music. Here

He found the quietness of antique pride
For in this arid meanness was upheld
The sanctity and consciousness of race.
The sons were seven and to fill a purse
Lean-sprung and empty, all did heavy toil,
Save only little Aaron still in school.
They held each penny with more painful care
Than Anglo-Saxon stature would allow
But paid to every bargainer his due.
And often when some sordid, shrewish wife
Called their dealings false in loud complaint
They quietly gave up the profit small
To save the name of Jew from one more curse.
Patiently the Patriarch would teach
His sons to mould their lives unto his own;
And often when they gathered to their home,
Too weary of their merchandise, he read
Talmudic lore and conned the ancient law.
The small house, burdened with so many lives
Was never ordered but no fretfulness
Broke its contentment and the mother's face
Was full of quiet smiles and austere love.
By zeal the wayward stranger might have
reached
Their kindly calmness but he heeded not.
When Irish lads of alien faith were by
He mocked the rabbi with them, and of nights,
He dipped in vice—half understanding it.
So recklessness was gathered. Some few months
He dwelt within the house, but still a stranger,

Not sensing its one common well-based thought
To lead a life as pleased the Patriarch.
To him the old Jew was a kinsman, poor
Like himself, and gilded with no glitter
That could attract his eye. The seven sons
Regarded him as one who tarried not,
A guest but for a day.

Once returned
From some late vigil in the city streets
The boy came home aflame and eager deeds
Leaped, all chaotic, in his heart. He stole
Into the bedroom where the eldest son
Lay reading on his cot. "Jacob," he called,
And poured in Jacob's patient ear the tales
Of lurid dramas seen in nickel shows.
The boy would reproduce each deed as done
And in description of a murder scene
Snatched from a shelf a weapon long unused,
The relic of a noisy festal day.
He flourished it in mad recital, sprung
The rusty trigger, and sent heavy death
Into drowsy Jacob's heart.

That sound,
Reverberating in the little house,
Burst like thunder in the Patriarch's dreams;
Roused the other sons to fear; the mother,
Knowing disaster in its first footstep,
With face gone grey, lay on her bed and waited.
Into the room, heart-hesitant in speed,
Came all the brothers who set up a cry

Over Jacob gasping in his pain.
In hurried dignity the father came,
Stumbled, heart-stricken, in the door and cried
One cry of anguish. There was then no need
To tell how had this sudden reckless death
Come with devastation to his house.
The boy, still pointing with his murderous hands,
In silence waited for the wrath to break,
But storm came not, and silent were they all.
Suddenly the sons would have put hands
Upon the interloper and one went
Screaming to the doorway, but a word
Checked him and he stood. The Patriarch
Knelt down and cast his arms about his son
And tears fell in his beard. Nothing moved
But sobbing grief. At last he turned to him
Who stood with blood upon his thankless hands.
“Go now,” he said. “Go far from here. I
would
That never should I see your face again.
Go now—go quickly, no one holds you—go.”
But as he went by in the gas-lit hall
The stranger shrank before the Patriarch
Fearing the dark menace of his eyes,
Not knowing how they blazed of other fires.
“Father,” Jacob called. The stranger passed.
Then quietly, but with fear-sickened haste,
The father sent for doctors who might wrest
Young Jacob back from death, and while he
prayed

They ministered. A thin grey morning broke
And in a van they took the son from home
To that grey, silent, pain-soaked pile, where
tears
Make everlasting mist, the hospital.
The Patriarch and his six sons went on
Day after day, with drudging toil and grief
Fit heartmates. But no word was ever spoke
To any stranger or to any friend
Of Jacob or the lodger who had gone.

Two weeks lay Jacob in the house of pain
Communing with his torture. At his door
He saw the silent trundle carts go by
With white-wrapped bodies to the ether pit,
Where surgeons, garbed like bakers, warmed
their knives
And scattered wounds like dice—to play with
death.
When Jacob went into the pit, death won.

Then when faith tottered in the father's heart,
They came, the flies of city carrion,
Reporters, undertakers, crass police
And buzzed about him. There they pressed his
grief
To tell the story o'er and o'er until
His brain was mad to bursting and his heart
Was crushed and sodden with his agony.

"You must tell who has done this thing," they
said,

"You must put into motion all the powers
Of coroners, police, publicity,
To find the man and fix the lasting stain
Of crime upon his head."

The Patriarch

Sat with his sons and answered not. He gave
Old funeral wines and funeral cakes and fed
The other bearded Jews who came to him.
But to their questions and the hectic quiz
Of small officials he gave one reply,
In saying, "Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord."
That was the antique mercy of his race
And in that he was fixed. These alien powers
Who whirled their speedy city round his home,
And moved in countless ways he did not sense,
And fought for prizes he would still have scorned,
Serving many other gods than Yahwe,
He despised, and would not traffic with them.
"Thus saith the Lord, Vengeance is Mine," he
said

In his own speech, and turned to his own
prayers.

One of Hebraic blood had done him wrong;
Between them should that score remain. His
race,

Close interlocked, close blooded, shut the town
From gazing on this cruel dishonour. Bowed
To grief his head was low, but lifted up

To breathe a slow defiance to the law
Of aliens who would help avenge his wrong.
These had not cost him any thought before
Nor should they come to sanctuary now,
Nor move the vestments of despair. His silence
Brought on his head their pettiness but left
Them no resource but anger. Unhurt, unmoved,
He wrapped himself in grief and held his peace.
He stood secure and in defeat went by
The whole machinery of pettiness.
None knew the far-fled boy. None could
disturb

The peace of Jacob's soul with clumsy justice.
Serene in the confusion of small gods
The Patriarch feared One and kept the Word.

Bred in lowly trafficking and trained
In ancient miseries of hate, the line
Of Moses lives from Nebo to a day
When city streets are deserts of despair.

THE CARDINAL DANCES

LIFE at the court of France was stiff brocade,
And Louis revelled in its banal sheen.
Basking in his smiles, his gallants played
For hearts or jewels. The king's eye was keen
At prizing trifles, but this pomp was mean
While Louis walked alone and knew no pride
Of sharing glory with a glorious queen.
So ministers into great kingdoms hied
To seek one, young, and fair enough to walk
beside.

But many grievous plans of state held back
The consummation of the king's desire
And kept him waiting till he filled the lack
Of queenly counsel with a giddy choir
Of chirping mistresses. None could aspire
To sit co-regent on his carven throne,
So each one gave her loveliness entire
(He told himself) for his love's sake alone.
He laughed at queens and said his fancy needed
none.

Too nimble in these follies was the king,
And if sometimes his mood grew slow and cold,

His counsellor could whisper hints to bring
His blood up, and his nymphs were always bold.
His counsellor, red-hatted, white, and old,
Dried up with scheming for imperious France,
Kept Louis blind, lest he might fear the hold
Of the cardinal's rule, and by an evil chance
See more than pleased him in one swift and kingly
glance.

The queen came on from Austria in spring,
And like the spring she was, like some young tree
Which feels a bursting gladness and the fling
Of sap that hastens upward. She could be
Like tear-wet April apple trees and she
Was young as a slim sapling to the core.
Into her changing days she could not see,
And gave, unthrifty, from her beauty's store
As if the spring and sun could shine for evermore.

You would have thought no hard magnificence
Could ever waste her freshness, and no cirque
Of gold could bind such brows in the intense
Unlovely lines of majesty. The smirk
Of painted courtiers would be fruitless work
To change a girl so wholesomely athrill
With sunlight, and no shadow things could lurk
About her feet, who lived with dauntless will
And a soft smile on the Fates who shatter or
fulfil.

Caparisoned to greet the Austrian queen
The court and town were restless till she came.
And when her beauty bloomed there and was
seen,

The wide streets gladdened with her shouted
name.

Her car was followed by a wild acclaim
And on their silken easy knees to fall
All court-bred Frenchmen filed. The shallow
game

Was played to win her smiles. One last of all
To pay his loyal homage stalked the cardinal.

He was no more than any red-robed priest;
There was no friend to whisper her, "Be kind."
And so before her cool hand was released
She drew it sharp away, and from her mind
Put memory of the tense, drawn face whose
lined

And sinister remembrance was a fear
To those who begged his pity and resigned
Their feeble faith in God, saw ruin near,
When he condemned them silently with solemn
sneer.

The cardinal rose up from his thin knees.
The colour scarcely flickered in his cheek;
His flush of shame went deeper. But with ease
He turned and chose one from the gallants
sleek

As if he might of some state matter speak,
But told him nothing, until, with a start
Dismissed him in excuses almost meek.
And ever eyed the queen and stood apart
Because her beauty stirred the beating of his
heart.

The cardinal's youth had withered; it had not
died,
And he was prey of sudden passions. The queen
Was in his dreams from that first night. He tried
To free himself, but her young face, once seen,
Was a provoking memory and a keen
Suggestion of desire. He filled his days
With enterprises mighty but between
His eye and France her face arose. A haze
Of thoughts too mad for thinking hung on his
austere ways.

He spied the queen from angles in the halls,
When she went by and her high laughter rang
To waken echoes from the dull gilt walls.
He listened, hidden, when she trilled and sang
Among the garden hedges, and a pang
Of jealous envy struck him when to each
Pert courtier who at her sweet bidding sprang
She gave a smile. Though priest he could not
preach
To his own passion which would some day find
its speech.

She never cared to know how Louis' power
Was gathered in the hands of this one
priest,
This gaunt red shadow whose thin brows could
lower
With such a tragic hatred, and whose least
Disdain could ruin lives. His love increased
Into a desperate tenderness, too like
The fawning of a silent scarlet beast,
Or like the intent slow whirring of a shrike,
Poised, with its talons loosened, ere they curl
and strike.

One day the queen walked, thoughtful, and
her maids
Chattered unheard behind her. She had caught
A mood of homesick longing for the glades
And green-lit woods she once knew, and she
thought
Unhappily of old days. This court had taught
Her heart that bravest smiling may not gain
The love and honour of a king, for nought
Of all her loveliness could end the reign
Of favourites who'd have scorned to spare her
any pain.

Silently, from behind the maidens, came
The cardinal, and in his deep eyes shone
The unearthly faggots of his soul in flame.
He signalled maids to go. He was alone,

Alone with his sad queen, and in a tone
Which made her turn and stare, he asked her
 leave
To speak of enterprises, not his own,
But of great import. She could not believe
That any man might dare thus pluck her by the
 sleeve.

He spoke with haggard gentleness of mien
But his hot gaze was searching for her eyes.
Her dignity was held up as a screen,
And when she deigned to give him brief replies
She looked across the garden absent-wise.
She knew he trembled but she never turned,
Nor cared to know if he spoke truth or lies.
She had not listened and she had not learned
That there were dangers in this man, yet
 undiscerned.

But, growing incoherent, he looked away
And lips which had been eloquent before
Were stiffened harshly. They were used to
 sway
And were not schooled to plead or to implore.
He stammered in embarrassment and tore
His sleeve with nervous fingers. In his rage
He cursed in whispers his poor lack of lore
Of such speech as was known to any page
And cursed in bitterness the stigma of his age.

He left the queen, amazed at his despair,
And sought release to cool his stammering
 wrath,
Thinking thereafter, for his peace, to share
A place with her familiars, haunt her path
And then as if to save her from the scath
Of Louis' coldness (though she was above
Mere admiration or the aftermath
Of jealousy-awakened spouse's love)
To offer his devotion—ask her to be the glove

In which his hand ruled France. Thus by
 degrees
He put himself within her reach. The sight
Of his gaunt eager face ceased to displease
The lonely young queen. His uncleric might
She carelessly leaned on as royal right,
And swayed grim cruelty with unthinking grace.
Then his hot hopes grew up again from blight;
Serene indifference left her sweet face,
He saw a haughty friendship growing in its
 place.

There came a day when some affair of state
Had caught the Austrian's fancy and they
 spoke
Secretly together on the fate
Of a noble who grew impudent. Then broke
The cardinal's control. She saw him choke

With a fierceness of entreaty, saw him fall
 And push his white face in her broidered cloak.
 But, seeing pain, she pitied not at all
 And her light laugh went chiming coolly through
 the hall.

A month before she might have called the
 guard,
 Nor doubted that her word would stronger be.
 But now although her sweet young eyes were
 hard

She listened when he stammered love, and she
 Rested her hands in his, nor pulled them free.
 "Be gracious, let me end deceit," he said,
 "Give me but leave to ease my heart to thee.
 "Be gracious." Then his fear and shame were
 fled;
 He towered compelling in his priestly robes of red.

"I am not one who could love any queen,
 "For I have all of France to take my heart.
 "But you are that one different who has seen
 "Me anguished, with sweet eyes which melt
 apart
 "The red veil on my soul. Bid me depart
 "Or bid me hope, you cannot wipe away
 "This honour for your glorious self. No art
 "Of praising have I, but my deeds can say
 "The speeches for me, and make great your
 royal day.

"Bid me serve France for you as I have served
"Her for herself. For your sake bid me turn
"Her kingdoms into empires. My arm, nerved
"With thinking on you, can make beacons burn
"On a thousand mountains so the world may
learn

"That Anne is empress!" With a distant smile
Anne heard his sounding speech. She did not
spurn

His importunate fierce hands but for a while
Looked slowly on him, with a face too sweet for
guile.

"But, my lord cardinal," she spoke at last,
"I am too young. My heart and loves are
swift.

"In council with you I am grave; once past
"The council door, I am a child. The gift

"Of my love must be given one who'll lift

"My heaviness of sorrow. Can you dance?

"Make merrier sport with me? Can your eyes
shift

"This solemn pleading for a happier glance?

"I have not seen you laugh. You do, sometimes,
perchance?"

"Aye, I might laugh again, if the queen would
smile."

"Laugh then and she might smile to see you lose

"The grimmest visage in her empire. While

"A lover frowns so thickly, she could choose

"No answer but her scorn. She'd not refuse
"To think on you, lord cardinal, as her friend
"If you would aid her weary days to amuse.
"Make sport for her and fate will kindness send.
"Her love?—Who knows what may reward
you in the end?"

The quick grey light leaped in the cardinal's
eye.

"To win your favour, I'd play harlequin,"
He jested. "Play it then," was her reply.
He raised the query with his eyebrows thin,
But she was earnest. "She may see you in
"Her chamber at the stroke of ten. The door
"Will open only to Pierrot. Sin
"May please a queen with laughter. Then no
more
"Of frowns, my lord. Let us hear your laughter
roar."

That night before the stroke of ten o'clock
A bony jester, white clad, left the suite
Of the mighty cardinal and slipped the lock
Behind him cautiously. As he might meet
The warders, he was masked. Some vision sweet
Made him a grinning ghost. His soft footfalls
Were stealthy and unheard as his thin feet
Went shuffling on the stone floor of the halls,
And his gaunt spindle shadow danced upon the
walls.

Before the perfumed doorway to his queen,
He paused and tentatively bent a knee,
Looked back, askance, to know if he'd been
seen,
Tried his old joints as if he meant to be
Impetuous and airy. She should see
His capering would not lack fire. The gloom
Behind him shadowed his thin-jowled glee.
The clock began the stroke of ten to boom;
He tapped. The door swung inward on an
empty room.

He bowed and there was laughter, a light sound
From some sweet throat behind the arras hid.
Its echoes faintly chiming sped around
The windy curtains. Scented tapers did
A flickering obeisance, as if bid
To laugh because a queen could laugh. The
space
Of half a heart-beat waited he, then slid
Like a contorted wraith to find the place
Whence came the queen's bright greeting, cried
he'd see her face.

"Hold back, Pierrot. Rein thy eager heart.
"Before the royal innocence be killed
"Pierrot must cavort and play his part.
"Or else—a bargain may not be fulfilled.
Dance now, lord cardinal." Her voice was
stilled

And he shook in an ague of delight
For all the shadows of the room were thrilled
With the seduction of a lover's night.
His queen was fairer even—hidden from his
sight.

In a servile bow his stern old back was bent—
Such a salute as he would give no king.
There came the music of some instrument,
A thin picked tune which tinkled on a string.
And he began his angled limbs to fling
About him in a grotesque mirthfulness.
He made a trial, rashly inspired, to sing.
A crooked whiteness in a jester's dress,
His dancing seemed the throes of some uncouth
distress.

He tried to whirl upon his wavering toes.
His arms went round like an unsteady wheel,
White-spoked and spinning on its hub. He rose
In spirals like a dervish, but one heel
Caught and he stumbled. He began to reel
But saved him from disaster by a fall
On his old knees; pretended then to kneel
And on his sovereign lady wildly call
To come if she could ever pity him at all.

He heard no answer but the curtain's sigh.
Her silence urged his fever like a lash.
He rose again and cast a desperate eye
At the deluding arras. In one dash

Across the room he made a gesture rash
And struck a vase, one of the royal toys,
Knocking it from its table with a crash.
He stopped and strove to gain his happy poise,
Most disconcerted by that sharp unhappy noise.

One would have thought it was not love but rage
Which gave his sallow cheek a flaming hue.
He sneered as if the vase had been a gage
From some unworthy foe. The fragments flew
Across the floor as he spurned them with his
shoe.

The giddy tune began again; he stood
Sullen a moment, then more crafty grew,
Willing to dance on gaily if he could.
His aching legs were slow and stiff as ancient
wood.

He made a few more awkward steps. His ear
Was straining to discover where she lay.
He circled and approached and felt her near.
The hand which picked his tune out ceased to
play.

"I have been mad. We love now as we may,"
He said and put his lean hand on his side,
Was fit to sob or curse his pride away.
He knew he was abased, but took one stride
And with a gasp of passion tore the curtains
wide.

There was a laughing roar, hysterical,
Long pent, from many throats. It smote his
face

With the scorn of Austrian courtiers, for all
The queen's own countrymen stood in that
place.

And they upon his foolish lack of grace
Had grinned and winked, behind the arras nook,
Spied on his fell lust, traitorous and base.
But the queen with her light laughing no more
shook.

She paused and shrank and blanched in the horror
of his look.

They were all reckless Austrians, no French,
Knowing the eager fury of his hate,
Would ever mock the cardinal nor entrench
Upon his secret passions. And their fate
Lay now before them, pitiless and straight.
So shuddering they slunk away; the while
Queen Anne tried to assume her regal state,
But flushed and trembled in a peasant style,
And the cardinal looked on her with a worm-
wood smile.

Once more the jester bowed, and left the room.
And a warder, come on suddenly, screaming fled,
Before the stalking ghastly face of doom
Pierrot wore to sanctuary. Dread

Lay on the stricken queen. His love was dead,
Was shame and ashes to him, and his power
Began that night in plots upon her head
To bring unnamed disasters and the glower
Of his red evil spite was on her from that hour.

King Louis' lush affections never turned
To Anne's surpassing loveliness, and nights
Of weeping took her bloom, and her eyes burned
Red and affrighted, gazing on grim sights.
Her thinking withered up her youth as blights
A febrile summer wind upon the field.
The king bestowed on many maids the rites
Of love which to his spouse he'd never yield.
Anne was afraid. Her secret never was revealed.

She never dared defy her fear and tell
Whence rumours of wild faithless revels came.
The cardinal's cold hate was like a spell
And she stood silent under lies and shame.
All enterprise was balked that bore her name,
For Louis gulped the lies and gave an ear
To all traducers, cast on her the blame
For his own sins. And the cardinal was near
To stir king's lechery and mock the queen's pale
fear.

He watched her heart-beats. When some
recompense,
Some comfort for her sorrowing hovered by,
And she reached piteous hands, he scattered hence

The beckoning occasion. His grey eye
Stalked her desires; he struck and watched
them die.

Her loneliness was like a desert; friends
Held to her bravely but a curse hung nigh
To tear them off. She sought to make amends
For scorn, but all her kind deeds came to bitter
ends.

So Anne the queen played harlequin. Dull
years

Went by in waiting on the cardinal's word.
Red hats ran in her nightmares and with tears
She stormed his heart, which never once was
stirred

With any weakening pity. Long deferred,
Choked with despair her hopes died, one by one.
Her queenly name was jested with and slurred.
Thus in one penance for the insult done
Her days in endless, futile weariness were spun.

THE WRECKER

THE sun rose slow and could not shake
A dull thick mist that veiled the lake
Nor warm the pale and chilling day;
For all night long the waves had clomb
Up the shoreways, spitting foam;
And on each wave the wind's white hand
Had lashed the water-beast to land.
Long thunders dinned and the Titan's spark
Split blinding caverns in the dark.
But now repentant for the night
Water and sky in one grey light
Shivered in dawn breath, misty cold.
The wave-lapped sands were wan and old.
At morn Raoul, the habitant,
Came out to loose his boat
And felt the dawn's reluctant breath
As a shudder in his throat.
Never before had harsh wind stirred
His sleep. Their rage went by unheard.
His boat was chained above the reach
Of clutching flow along the beach
And never rain sheets, lashing fierce
Against his cabin's side, could pierce
The chink-filled logs. So he had slept
With wife and son until dawn crept

Behind the mist and slowly paled
To find the earth so coldly veiled.
But, strangely, while this storm had torn
The bosomed lake, his sleep had borne
Dark terrors and he faced the air,
The spray-fresh air, as if to find
Some riddle-reading clearness there
And shake the phantoms from his mind.
Within the hut, his wife, Collette,
Began with breakfast fires to fret.
She clattered bowls and coughed in smoke
Till little René, too, awoke
And came half-clad to see the sun;
His day with wonder was begun.
"Oh, Mother, did you hear the wind?"
He shouted. "Did you see
"The big clouds in the thunder-light
"Come swooping after me?
"I hid my face, and held my breath
"When thunder-guns were fired.
"This morning I am brave again.
"See how the lake seems tired."
"No, no, my child," said vain Collette,
"The waves are feeble here.
"When I was young in Brittany
"We waked to silent fear
"When scattered wrecks rolled up the sands
"In the springtime of the year.
"Scattered wrecks rolled up the sands—
"My little sisters went

"Out upon those treasure fields
"With sodden glory sprent.
"Treasures fell of silken robes
"And garments, smooth and fine,
"Jewels set in braces bright,
"And casks of yellow wine.
"No great ships go by this place,
"Only winds go by."

She sighed and watched the wide grey lake
With an old dream in her eye.

"But then you saved the people, too.
"Did they give all their gold to you
"Because you saved them?"

"No, René,

"The poor folk always drowned.
"They lay among their splintered boats
"Tide-scattered on the ground.
"And sometimes when the fearful night
"Had held us locked indoors for fright,
"At morn we found their corpses wet
"With eyeballs rolled in terror yet.
"We wept to think that shrieking wild
"Which we had called the storm
"Had been the anguish of a child
"While we were safe and warm."

And René smiled—"But there was gold—"

"Aye, there was gold—and wine."

His mother heaped up memories
To see his wide eyes shine.

The dream was old ere she was born

And lived in all her line.
But as his mother told the tale
With childish conning o'er,
As her own sire had told to her,
And his own sire before,
The boy looked out, his eyes at strain,
As if he saw a wreck-strewn main
And knew his treasures by their gleam
Beside the dipping spar and beam.
Athwart the shingle as he gazed
He saw his father's form upraised
And turning toward the door. The boy
Shrilled to Collette excited joy
And felt a thrill in his young soul.
His father bore a silken roll.
He carried it across his breast,
But the misted light was dim,
And the boy saw only muddy silks
That trailed on after him.
"There's treasure—treasure from the lake."
He ran, all eagerness, to take
His first touch of the dripping prize—
He did not see his father's eyes.
But as Collette flung wide the door
She shuddered for the wind before
Raoul, who entered, filled the room
With the clinging damp chill of a tomb.
Raoul stooped to his straight hewn chair
And sighed, but nothing said.
His hands were twined with dripping hair,

He bore a woman—dead.
Slow drops slid from her drowned black hair
To the floor in a reptile pool
That writhed and ran on the ragged boards.
“The lake sends gifts,” said Raoul.
His wife cried, “Drowned?” with a sign of fear.
“There are no ships—how came she here?”
And as his father pulled a fold
Of silk across the eyes to hold
The last dark secret from their gaze,
And Collette stood in awed amaze,
The boy spoke out with impious lips,
“Where is the treasure from the ships?
“There were great ships that broke last night;
“Where are the jewels in braces bright?
“Where are the casks? Where are the—?”
“Hush!”

His mother clipped his speech.
The boy crept stealthy, as they stood,
And vanished down the beach.
Collette broke stillness with a laugh,
“Come, eat. Here’s breakfast set.
“I can’t wait all the day for you
“Because her eyes are wet.”
But Raoul held his peace, nor spoke,
And watched the dripping silken cloak,
And saw the pitiful smooth line
Of limbs beneath the silk entwine,
Wondering, patient but doubt-tossed,
From what far bourne this life was lost.

He knew too well there were no ships;
He turned to speak once but his lips
Were too aghast to breathe a sound
Before the presence of this veiled
And silent being who was drowned
In a lake where no ships sailed.
And Collette laughed again, her fear
Had left her giddy. "Come, my dear,
"What care you for women dead?
"Come to your morning's food," she said.
Her laugh was mirthless and her face
Was empty as a desert place.
Raoul turned toward her his gaunt head
And answered her, "Vex not the dead."
His lips were stiffened then with grief
As if the lake had been the thief
Of one he treasured. "Wife," he said,
"Last night when rain was scourging earth
"And we were dreaming in our bed,
"There were long screams of death and birth.
"I heard them and I tried to wake,
"I prayed them cease for Jesus' sake,
"I groped to find you, but I dreamed
"And your place cold and empty seemed.
"Then when the dawn stir came to me
"I saw upon your eyes
"The shadow of some fearful loss.
"I thought those hideous cries
"Had been the death pang of your soul;
"I did not hope to find you whole.

“Even now I—” Collette’s fear
Came back upon her in his stare
And she felt the horror sweat
Stirring underneath her hair.
“Raoul, my husband, turn your eyes
“From off that cursèd body. See—
“I am not changed from what I was.
“The night brought no such dreams to me.
“Give over sick thoughts.” But Raoul
Held his eyes still upon the pool,
Distraught and helpless to declare
The meaning of his strange despair.
He too had thoughts of Brittany
And the storms of that remembered sea;
The winds and wreckage and the heave
Of fathom-stirring waves that leave
A thin caress along the sand
Cruel as a treacherous hand;
Where gaunt cliffs, endlessly attacked
By the long coil and splash impact,
Imperishably stand; where men
Build up each shattered hope again
From endless devastation, hold
To ancient dreams of too much gold
And seek among their iron days
Brief bitter gleams of princelier ways.
From there Raoul had sundered faith
And gone, unhindered, to find breath
In wildernesses, and Collette
Had followed querulous, but met

The wave and wilderness unhurt
With wifely resolution girt.
Deep in the stillness of the wood
And in the wideness of the lake
Raoul had found the reach and space
He had sought for his soul's sake.
He homed him by an inland sea
With a fruitful wooded shore
Where man had never ploughed before.
But as poison lurks concealed
After wounds are over-healed,
After leeches draw and go,
And no red scars the blemish show,
When a swift convulsive stab
Betrays corruption working deep;
So old avarice may keep
Even after many days,
Though over-glossed, its venomous ways.
Raoul knew not what nameless deed
The night had done, nor what vile seed
Long planted in his destiny
Had of a sudden dared to be;
But hideous nightmares wracked his brain.
He thought that in the whirl of rain
The soul that he had brought to life
Within the child mind of his wife
Had slipped beyond his grasp, had drowned,
With dripping silk was lying wound.
"Perhaps there are ships then," a light
Gleamed in Collette's eye, fever bright.

A sudden sweeping soul-sprung thought
Made all her awe-struck silence nought.
"Perhaps there are ships then, and she
"Is one of many who may be
"Washing ghastly on our shore.
"Though they have never sailed before
"There may be tall ships sailing now,
"And tempest-struck, one drove her prow
"Shuddering, helpless into doom—"
She paused, her mind outran her speech.
But Raoul gazed across the room
With eyes, like fingers, set to reach
And all the formless wishes find
That stirred a hot mist in her mind.
So ere she knew her hopefulness
He knew. It was not vague distress
In shattered galleons she saw,
But sodden gain; no pious awe
For storming fury; no regret
For piteous faces stark and wet,
But finery with anguish wreathed
And wealth by slimy death bequeathed.
Collette was dizzy with desire,
Forgotten now was breakfast fire,
Forgotten was her silent guest,
Raoul's deep question, half expressed,
She stepped once toward the sandy shore.
Her husband stood up in the door.
"There are no ships," he whispered, rent
With passioned questioning still pent

Behind the barrier of his words.

"The wide grey lake is bare

"And sleeps, unrippled by a keel.

"There are no ships out there,

"No sailing ships." From Collette's heart

She felt an angry torrent start

And hate-spiced words of old complaint

Now crowding broke their long restraint.

"Why must we live outside of life?

"Why must we see but lake and sky?

"I'd rather never have been wife

"If in this wilderness I die.

"My mother and my sisters sit

"Beside the shore in Brittany,

"And wonder when the storms drive on

"What far lone wood is housing me.

"They wonder why you never come

"Heavy with riches to your home.

"They think we seek in this harsh land

"Some hoard of comfort, but your hand

"Is never turned to any gain

"And all our wandering has been vain."

Raoul was silent. "Speak," she cried,

"We have found labour—what beside?

"My hands break with the tasks I do

"To make hell habitable for you."

Raoul knew pity. "I have worked

"To ease the heavy toil that irked

"Your woman's strength. I did not see

"How weary you were, spite of me.

“And I have loved you.” He had spoken
As if his hopes had now been broken.
Collette mistook his final tone,
Thought his decision was her own,
And looked at him in still surprise,
A wan hope struggling in her eyes.
“We will go back—to Brittany?
“Where my poor mother weeps for me,
“Where my beloved big seas clamour,
“And all my childhood’s love puts glamour
“Over granite, sand, and coast?”
But she saw his eyes turn cold
And she knew her plea was lost.
“Then we linger here till old,
“Feeble, broken, in despair,
“We creep back to pity there!”
Raoul spoke gently, “We have found
“Peace and freedom here. Around
“The fruited lake shore lives there none
“Who has not left as we have done
“All desire of gain behind,
“Content with space for soul and mind.”
Collette impatiently replied
And sneered, “Aye—space, and what beside?”
Raoul turned to the sodden roll
And thought again of that calm soul
He’d hoped to wake in Collette’s breast
While she was sharing his long quest.
All trace of understanding gone,
Collette raged like a pettish child

And all his stern desires reviled
In fury. Raoul was alone.
Then came René, with noisy speed,
Home to his mother in his need
Of comfort for his broken hope—
“I searched the long beach and the slope,
“I walked as far as I could go
“And still see home. There was no gold,
“There was no treasure. Mother told
“Me how the wrecks lay in a row
“With all their jewels and treasures thrown
“Where I could get them for my own.”
Then Raoul seized his son and turned
The boy’s face to his own and burned
A long, long question into eyes
Where he saw tears of anger rise,
But through the mist of childish tears
Shone deadly answer to the fears
Of the dark father. There was nought
Of Raoul’s soul in this boy’s soul.
All his hue of life had caught
From his fond mother old-world taint.
Raoul spoke out with edged constraint
To his harsh wife, “I thought our child,
“Nurtured, rooted in the wild,
“Would be unsmirched and fancy whole
“From any poison of desire.
“The fevered stories that you told
“To your René were falsehoods old
“Learned in Brittany from your sire.

“There are no ships. There never were
“On these clean shores, nor over there—
“No treasure ships. The foolish myth
“You’ve nursed and filled his young mind with
“Was festering in your father’s thought.
“It stains my son; and you have wrought
“Unending restless misery
“In him, for greed has even now
“Set her dull mark upon his brow
“And her hot groveller must he be.”
Collette raged on and would not hark,
And Raoul’s face set grim and stark
And stony. Over all the three
There fell a silence. Fury spent,
Collette sank down and René went
To hide his hot face in her skirt,
To hide his terror and his hurt.
The woman, wearied now but still
Uneased and pettish, spoke in shrill
Tired fretfulness, “Take from my sight
“That stranger’s dripping body. Free
“Your house of this dissension. Blight
“And fierce suspicions did not lurk
“Within your door before the murk
“Of death and drowning troubled you,
“When you found this corpse. Go strew
“The pine boughs over her and deep
“Dig her a grave and let her sleep.”
Raoul took kindly from the floor
The silken sodden one.

He set his flint face toward the shore
But for reply gave none.
And still Collette saw puzzled pain
Burn heavy in his eyes, but vain
Repentant pity. He passed on
And as she called him he was gone.
She saw him near the beach as if
To take his burden in the skiff
To some far burial. But he passed
The long boat's mooring and the last
Extending point of land. Collette
Saw that he splashed unheeding yet
Could not believe. Then sudden dread
Came down upon her and she sped
Screaming after and René
Came stumbling. Out upon the grey
Face of the lake they saw Raoul
Swim on unheeding and the cool
Wind blew their shouts back in their faces
And echoes came from wooded spaces.
He never turned. Collette took strength
From terror and the long boat's length
Went grating over sand. The sail
Went rattling out and like a pale
Bird, stiff with cold, the boat swung round.
Wind-shaken, standing in the stern
Collette, with eyes set to discern
The speck her husband had become,
Held hard the rudder and René
Knelt in the bow beneath the spray

Crouching, staring, scared, and dumb.
Collette had ceased to call. The sound
Of parted waters rippling by
Filled up the silence.

One tense cry
Came from the woman, then she sank
Inert beside her rudder. Blank
And empty was the water's face.
The speck was gone. And René shrank
Whimpering in his lookout place.
The sail flapped and the boat swung. Back
It pointed to the shore. A track
Of sunlight sifted through the clouds;
The wind stirred restless in the shrouds.
The sun broke through and up the lake
The dull grey mist was thinned;
But Raoul's hut, with breakfast set,
Was tenanted by wind.

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